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## **Subtle Asian traits and COVID-19: congregating and commiserating as East Asians in a Facebook group**

Abidin, Chrystal ; Zeng, Jing

**Abstract:** This paper studies how members of Subtle Asian Traits (SAT), a massive Facebook group of over 1.8 million members, congregate and commiserate online over their growth pains and experiences as (diasporic) East Asians. Founded in September 2018 by a group of Asian-Australian teenagers ‘as a joke’, SAT members share ‘Asian positive’ stories, resources, and memes through an average of 1,200 new posts daily. Alongside global milestone events, such as the rise of K-pop in the Global North and Korean film *Parasite*’s unprecedented four awards at the Academy Awards, SAT has also evolved into a space to celebrate Asian excellence, tease out identity politics, and discuss issues of injustice. However, upon the onset of COVID-19, the posts on SAT have swiftly pivoted to the everyday lived experiences of (diaspora) East Asians around the world. In this paper, we reflect on our experiences as East Asian diaspora members on SAT, and share our observations of meaning-making, identity-making, and community-making as East Asians who are collectively coping with our cultural identities and with COVID-19 aggression. Specifically, we study how Asianness is negotiated, circulated, and commodified on SAT, and offer the concept of ‘platformed Asianness’ to understand how being Asian online is co-constructed by an international Asian diaspora, group admins, and the technological affordances of Facebook.

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# Subtle Asian Traits and COVID-19: Congregating and commiserating as East Asians in a Facebook group by Crystal Abidin and Jing Zeng

## Abstract

This paper studies how members of Subtle Asian Traits (SAT), a massive Facebook group of over 1.8 million members, congregate and commiserate online over their growth pains and experiences as (diasporic) East Asians. Founded in September 2018 by a group of Asian-Australian teenagers ‘as a joke’, SAT members share ‘Asian positive’ stories, resources, and memes through an average of 1,200 new posts daily. Alongside global milestone events, such as the rise of K-pop in the Global North and Korean film *Parasite*’s unprecedented four awards at the Academy Awards, SAT has also evolved into a space to celebrate Asian excellence, tease out identity politics, and discuss issues of injustice. However, upon the onset of COVID-19, the posts on SAT have swiftly pivoted to the everyday lived experiences of (diaspora) East Asians around the world. In this paper, we reflect on our experiences as East Asian diaspora members on SAT, and share our observations of meaning-making, identity-making, and community-making as East Asians who are collectively coping with our cultural identities and with COVID-19 aggression. Specifically, we study how Asianness is negotiated, circulated, and commodified on SAT, and offer the concept of ‘platformed Asianness’ to understand how being Asian online is co-constructed by an international Asian diaspora, group admins, and the technological affordances of Facebook.

## Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Methodology](#)

[Facebook groups and Subtle Asian Traits](#)

[‘Platformed Asianness’ on SAT](#)

[Cultures of Asian affinity on SAT](#)

[Topical shifts in SAT during COVID-19](#)

[SAT comments & discursive strategies around COVID-19](#)

[Conclusion: SAT as a repository of milestones and identity markers](#)